New Zealand Maori/Pacific Islanders in Australia

The Pacific Island populations are growing fast in Queensland. According to the 2006 Australian Census, the total number of Pacific Islanders and New Zealanders (10.9% are Maori and an unknown number are other Pacific Islanders) in Queensland rose by approximately 30% between 2001 and 2006. The 2006 Census revealed that more than 30,000 (46%) Queenslanders identify as having Maori ancestry (the largest number in Australian states), while more than 35,000 people (more than in any other state except NSW) indicated their ancestry from other Pacific Islander groups.

Information

Our major issues as community workers working on the Gold Coast/Brisbane are New Zealanders who have come here unprepared and with misinformation.

Government workers in New Zealand are giving people the wrong information. People are still being told by WINZ call centre staff (in particular) that they only have to live in Australia for 2 years then they will qualify for an Australian benefit. This is not true!

With the introduction of the Trans Tasman Policy in 2001 everything changed. New Zealanders still have the right to come in and out of Australia as they please. Upon arrival into the country, if one ticks the box indicating the move here is permanent, then one is automatically assigned a special visa category enabling one to live and work in this country but that’s all. New Zealanders continually make the mistake in thinking that by ticking this box they are now a permanent residents. This is not true!

In Australia, one has to be a Permanent Resident or Australian citizen to qualify for;
- Unemployment benefits and alike
- Assisted housing including emergency accommodation
- Assisted Job search services
- Student loans and allowances
- Most government programs

New Zealanders (non Permanent Residents) do qualify for;
- Medicare
- Home loans including first home loan incentives
- Family Tax Benefit A & B for people and families with children (depending on income)
- Free schooling

Our reciprocal agreement with Australia with regards to benefit assistance extends to Invalids Benefit, Veterans Pension and Superannuation only. Please see the attached link; http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/travelling-or-migrating/social-security-agreements/australia.html

It is a convoluted process.

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Education

There is no reciprocal agreement with regards to New Zealanders accessing financial assistance for tertiary education in Australia. To qualify for a student loan or allowance one must be a permanent resident or Australian citizen. However in New Zealand there are no such restrictions, currently an Australian citizen or permanent resident can get a student loan, please see the attached link;
http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/liaison/australian_students.shtml

Granted, from January 2011 this will change. From 1 January 2011, permanent residents and Australian citizens will be subject to a two year stand-down before they can receive a Student Loan. This means that they will need to have lived in New Zealand for at least two years and be ordinarily resident in New Zealand. Permanent residents will also need to have held permanent residence for at least two years to qualify. ³ Whilst we applaud the changes, New Zealand is still 10 years behind in terms of reciprocal processes for New Zealanders wanting to study in Australia.

We can’t even send our rangatahi home to study because some degrees are not comparable to the Australian equivalent and therefore not accepted/recognised.

Janette Varley applied for a position as a case worker with Gold Coast Youth Justice where she is presently employed as a casual youth worker. Janette has a Bachelor of Applied Social Sciences with an endorsement in Maori counselling from WINTEC (Waikato Institute of Technology). She was told it did not have all the components required and therefore she could not be considered for the position. Additionally, no consideration was given to her many years of experience and self-belief in her ability to do the job, all focus was on what the “paperwork” was saying.

Major state high schools on the Gold Coast report on average 35% of their students identify as Maori and/or Polynesian;
• Upper Coomera State College has 3,000 students and faculty alone, their percentage equates to 1,000 students identifying as Maori and/or Polynesian⁴.
• Coombabah State High School reports 70% of their 2010 enrolments so far have been New Zealanders⁵.
• Keebra Park High School has the highest numbers with 69% of their students identifying as Maori and/or Polynesian⁶.

This is a huge number of Maori and/or Polynesian young people who will potentially be leaving school without means for accessing university and/or other tertiary education facilities.

⁴ As provided by Hugh Roberts, Cultural Education Counselor, Queensland Education
⁵ As provided by Hugh Roberts, Cultural Education Counselor, Queensland Education
⁶ As provided by Tahana Burgess, Cultural Education Counselor, Queensland Education
Whanau / Rangatahi

Increasingly here on the Gold Coast/Brisbane we as community and youth workers have experienced issues around Maori and/or Polynesian children being sent over from New Zealand to live with older siblings, cousins or aunties and uncles. The reasons for the passage are numerous, but more often than not tends to be due to getting in trouble at home (NZ).

As there is no access to benefits for these kids, their Australian caregivers are left to financially support them, a burden they are not generally prepared for. As their vested interest in the child is not a parental one, these kids are often left to their own devices, arriving at school without food, proper uniforms or resources, getting in trouble at school, truanting and progressing to criminal activities.

The following organisations have all informally reported an increase in numbers of Maori and/or Pacific Island youth involved their services;

- Gold Coast Youth Justice - youth convicted of crime and serving court orders
- Gold Coast Youth Justice Family Conferencing - youth due for court hearings
- Gold Coast Child Safety - youth identified as at risk of abuse and/or neglect

These organisations have also identified these numbers are increasingly youth without parental support in Australia.

The Brisbane Children’s Court office is also seeing a significant rise in young Maori and Polynesian offenders and specifically gang related violent crimes. Brisbane South office reports 28% of their current caseload are Maori.

The reality is Maori and Pacific Islanders are unable to access culturally appropriate legal advice and support services. Many families of young offenders have no knowledge of the Australian judicial system or its partnering agencies. Connected to that, there are few Kaupapa Maori Services or Pacific Island services in place to support whanau/fanau and fewer Maori and Polynesian Police officers to engage with whanau/fanau.

The Gold Coast Youth Service is an organisation that provides advice, support and brokerage for Australian youth (12-25 years) at risk of homelessness. They have reported a double in numbers in the last two years of New Zealand youth accessing their services which due to residency eligibility restrictions can only include a food parcel, sleeping bag and a tent!

Please note, the above identified agencies have reported these statistics informally at our local level. New Zealanders in Australia, regardless of cultural identity, are all classed as ‘Other’ in the ethnicity check box on ANY Australian government form. The Australian Government only collects ethnicity statistics on;

- Australian
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Other

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7 As provided by Joshua Woollett, Court Officer, Department of Communities
8 As provided by William Aufa’i, Youth Worker, Gold Coast Youth Service
Summary

Our people move here to have a better and provide a better life for their families. For many, these aspirations become real and they experience a marked improvement in their lifestyle. However, from a community services perspective, there should be more emphasis from New Zealand agencies, departments, organisations and media on the actuality of how hard it is to set up here. There should be more education and information on the;

- lack of entitlements
- lack of social/community/cultural agencies
- lack of government support for these emerging social and cultural issues
- lack of financial assistance for further or tertiary education

Our people need to come here to a job, with money in their pockets to set themselves up, buy a car (public transport on the Gold Coast in particular is poor) and have a contingency plan should their financial situation change.

There also needs to be as much thought and emphasis on how such a move can affect our rangatahi and their future prospects. What happens when they finish school?

From a government point of view, Australia does not offer the same considerations to New Zealanders as New Zealand does to Australians. There needs to be a visible equality and acknowledgement of the supposed unique relationship our two countries have.

Permanent Residency

As an example, an application for a family of four (4) to apply for the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS 857) visa costs;

- DIAC Visa Application Charge: $2,575.00
- DIAC Employer Nomination Charge: nil
- Regional Certification Fee (CCIQ): $550.00
- Medical Examination ($300.00 per person): $1,200.00
- TOTAL: $4,325.00

New Zealanders cannot simply apply for permanent residency. There are (visa) categories, each with strict and stringent criteria, and many New Zealanders do not necessarily qualify.

Message

If you are intend to come here temporarily, then all good, have a plan to get back home.

If you are intent on setting up a life here, know and plan what you need to do and whether or not it can be done, before you get here.

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9 As provided by Industry Migration Pty Ltd on 09/08/2010